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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
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INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
AMEMBASSY MINSK
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PTER ETRD EAID ECON BO RS VM
SUBJECT: NONG DUC MANH VISITS RUSSIA AND BELARUS,
-- REAFFIRMS PERSONAL AND BILATERAL TIES

REF: HANOI 2493

11. (U) SUMMARY. NONG DUC MANH, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM (CPV), VISITED RUSSIA OCTOBER 9-13 AND BELARUS OCTOBER 13-15. ALL SIDES HAVE DESCRIBED THE CAREFULLY SCRIPTED VISITS AS "SUCCESSFUL." MANH'S FOCUS WAS ON IMPROVING TRADE AND REAFFIRMING HIS "STRONG PERSONAL RELATIONS." RUSSIA DOES NOT APPEAR ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH VIETNAM; BELARUS DOES, HOWEVER. OTHER TOPICS RAISED INCLUDED CAM RANH BAY (AT LEAST INFORMALLY); INCREASING COOPERATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE; THE OVERSEAS VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY; AND TERRORISM. A SEPARATE GVN MILITARY DELEGATION DISCUSSED SEARCH-AND-RESCUE COOPERATION WITH RUSSIAN COUNTERPARTS, WHILE ANOTHER MILITARY DELEGATION VISITED BELARUS JUST AFTER MANH DEPARTED. REFTEL REPORTED ON MANH'S VISIT TO JAPAN, WHICH TOOK PLACE JUST PRIOR TO HIS VISITS TO RUSSIA AND BELARUS. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) THIS WAS MANH'S FIRST VISIT TO RUSSIA AND BELARUS. SINCE BECOMING GENERAL SECRETARY IN APRIL 2001, ALTHOUGH HE HAD BEEN TO BOTH PREVIOUSLY AS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CHAIRMAN. HIS HOSTS, PRESIDENTS PUTIN AND LUKASHENKO, HAD EACH VISITED VIETNAM WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS. PRIME MINISTER PHAN VAN KHAI VISITED THE TWO COUNTRIES IN SEPTEMBER 2000. OFFICIALS

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WHO ACCOMPANIED MANH ON THIS TRIP INCLUDED DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER VU KHOAN, FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN DY NIEN, SEVERAL
HIGH RANKING CPV OFFICIALS, MINISTER OF PLANNING AND
INVESTMENT VO HONG PHUC, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY HOANG TRUNG
HAI, AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING NGUYEN MINH
HIEN.

13. (U) IN RUSSIA, MANH SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME IN MOSCOW, WHERE HE MET WITH PRESIDENT PUTIN, PRIME MINISTER KASYANOV, THE SPEAKER OF THE DUMA, MOSCOW'S MAYOR, AND SEVERAL LEADERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF RUSSIA, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. MANH ALSO VISITED ST. PETERSBURG'S ACADEMY OF FORESTRY, WHERE HE HAD STUDIED IN THE LATE 1960S AND WHERE HE ON THIS VISIT HAD "INFORMAL AND FRIENDLY" EXCHANGES WITH FACULTY AND STUDENTS, ACCORDING TO VLADIMIR TOKMAKOV, RUSSIAN EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY. IN BELARUS, MANH MET WITH PRESIDENT ALEXANDER LUKASHENKO, UPPER CHAMBER SPEAKER ALEXANDER VOITOVICH, LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER VADIM POPOV, AND FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SERGEY SIDORSKY, ACCORDING TO INFORMATION PROVIDED BY BELARUS EMBASSY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES

ALEKSANDER PARKHUTA.

TRADE - IMPROVING

14. (SBU) BILATERAL TRADE WITH RUSSIAN IS REPORTEDLY EXPECTED TO INCREASE ALMOST 40 PERCENT FROM 2001 TO 2002 - TO ALMOST USD 700 MILLION - BUT THIS REMAINS "MODEST" COMPARED TO BILATERAL TRADE BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE U.S. AND VIETNAM AND THE PRC, ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES. (TRADE UNCLASSIFIED

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WITH THE U.S. IS EXPECTED TO REACH ABOUT USD 1.7 BILLION THIS YEAR WHILE TRADE WITH THE PRC WILL PROBABLY EXCEED USD 3 BILLION.) TWO-WAY TRADE CURRENTLY FAVORS RUSSIA - ITS EXPORTS TO VIETNAM ARE ABOUT DOUBLE ITS IMPORTS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS AND THE VIETNAM TRADE PROMOTION AGENCY. WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAILS, THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY'S TOKMAKOV SAID THAT PROSPECTS ARE "EXCELLENT" FOR TWO-WAY TRADE TO REACH USD ONE BILLION "OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS." TOKMAKOV OPINED THAT ONE REASON FOR THE MOST RECENT JUMP WAS THE VISIT OF PRESIDENT PUTIN TO VIETNAM IN MARCH 2001, AND THE "MANY ADDITIONAL BUSINESS CONTACTS" THAT THIS VISIT HAD FACILITATED. ADDITIONALLY, VIETNAM IS BEGINNING TO INVEST IN JOINT VENTURES IN RUSSIA, ESPECIALLY IN THE FOODSTUFFS AND GARMENT INDUSTRIES.

15. (SBU) MANH'S DELEGATION RAISED THE IDEA OF A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH RUSSIA. TOKMAKOV AND, SEPARATELY, DR. BUI HUY KHOAT, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF EUROPEAN STUDIES OF THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES, NOTED THAT THIS HAD BEEN ON THE GVN'S AGENDA PREVIOUSLY, BUT THE RUSSIANS CONTINUE TO BE "UNENTHUSIASTIC" ABOUT IT, ACCORDING TO KHOAT. TOKMAKOV SAID THAT THE RUSSIAN SIDE HAD REQUESTED ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATIONS FROM THE VIETNAMESE AS TO JUST WHAT THEY MEAN BY A "FREE TRADE AGREEMENT." DR. KHOAT OPINED IT WOULD "PROBABLY" BE DISCUSSED AT THE NEXT SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION, BUT NOTED THAT RUSSIA IS "MOST LIKELY MORE INTERESTED IN

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	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00
	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00
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ACCESSION TO THE WTO" THAN NEGOTIATING A SEPARATE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH VIETNAM. (NOTE: WHAT VIETNAM IS MOSTLY LIKELY SEEKING IS LOWER TARIFFS ON VIETNAMESE GOODS EXPORTED TO RUSSIA. END NOTE)

16. (U) TRADE WITH BELARUS IS "VERY MODEST," ADMITTED NGUYEN MANH HUNG, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE CPV CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S COMMISSION FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS. DURING THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 2002, TRADE TURNOVER REACHED JUST USD 15 MILLION. (THIS APPEARS TO REPRESENT A DECLINE FROM 2001, WHEN BILATERAL TRADE REACHED ABOUT USD 41 MILLION, ACCORDING TO ONE PRESS REPORT.) VIETNAM IMPORTS TRUCKS, TRACTORS, MOTORBIKES, FERTILIZERS, AND ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT AND EXPORTS RICE, GROUND NUTS, COFFEE, PROCESSED FRUIT AND

VEGETABLES, TEXTILES, AND FOOTWEAR.

17. (SBU) HUNG (WHO ACCOMPANIED MANH ON THE TRIP) EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT MANH'S VISIT WILL "HELP BOTH SIDES REACH THEIR TRADE POTENTIAL." HE POINTED TO A "PRELIMINARY" AGREEMENT FOR VIETNAM TO ASSEMBLE BELARUS TRACTORS (CONTINGENT UPON A FEASIBILITY STUDY) AS WELL AS A JOINT VENTURE TO ASSEMBLE MINSK MOTORBIKES, WHICH ARE POPULAR IN VIETNAM'S MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, BELARUS HAS THUS FAR ONLY INVESTED IN TWO JOINT VENTURES - BOTH IN QUANG NINH PROVINCE IN NORTHEASTERN VIETNAM: ONE TO REFURBISH USED TRUCKS AND ANOTHER TO PRODUCE CONDOMS. HUNG DID NOT EXPLAIN

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WHY BILATERAL TRADE WILL APPARENTLY DECLINE THIS YEAR, BUT NOTED THAT, "ON THE POSITIVE SIDE," BELARUS LEADERS HAVE INDICATED INTEREST IN A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH VIETNAM. WHILE HE EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD EXPAND TWO-WAY TRADE "SIGNIFICANTLY," HE DECLINED TO PREDICT WHEN IT MIGHT BE CONCLUDED OR PROVIDE DETAILS AS TO WHAT SUCH AN AGREEMENT MIGHT ENTAIL.

CAM RANH BAY - NO CHANGE IN STATUS

18. (SBU) DR. KHOAT AND TOKMAKOV CONFIRMED SEPARATELY THAT CAM RANH BAY WAS NOT OFFICIALLY ON THE AGENDA. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO A RUSSIAN PRESS REPORT, MANH AND PUTIN BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE FUTURE OF THE BASE AND MANH PROMISED IT WOULD "NOT BE GIVEN AWAY TO ANY STATE." THE CPV'S HUNG SAID THAT HE "DID NOT RECALL" THE TWO LEADERS DISCUSSING CAM RANH BAY, BUT SAID THAT THE CITED PRESS REPORT WAS CONSISTENT WITH VIETNAM'S POSITION, WHICH IS "WELL-KNOWN TO RUSSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES." (NOTE: THE GVN HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT WOULD NOT LEASE CAM RANH BAY AGAIN TO ANY SINGLE FOREIGN MILITARY. END NOTE)

COOPERATION

19. (SBU) HUNG SAID THAT THE VISITS HAD PROVIDED A FORUM TO DISCUSS COOPERATION IN OTHER AREAS, SPECIFICALLY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES, AS WELL AS VIETNAM'S

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DESIRE TO SEE RUSSIA EXPAND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR VIETNAMESE STUDENTS. HUNG CITED A "VERY POSITIVE" MEETING BETWEEN GVN DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (AND FORMER TRADE MINISTER) VU KHOAN AND RUSSIA'S DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER KRISTENKO, DURING WHICH THEY DISCUSSED A "GENERAL FRAMEWORK" FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION. HUNG SAID THAT THIS WOULD BE REVIEWED IN MORE DETAIL AT THE NEXT INTER-GOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION MEETING, SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE IN DECEMBER. IN ADDITION, HUNG NOTED THAT THE LEADERS DISCUSSED THEIR DESIRE FOR "FURTHER CULTURAL TIES" BETWEEN CITIES IN RUSSIA AND VIETNAM. REGARDING TRAINING, HUNG SAID THAT VIETNAMESE CONTINUE TO REGARD RUSSIA AS A "DESIRABLE LOCATION" FOR ADVANCED STUDIES AND TRAINING. ALTHOUGH UNABLE TO CITE SPECIFIC FIGURES, HUNG SAID THE NUMBERS OF VIETNAMESE STUDYING IN RUSSIA IS "INCREASING STEADILY;" MANH THANKED PUTIN FOR RUSSIA'S CONTINUED SUPPORT IN THIS SECTOR. (NOTE: IN THE HEYDAY OF EDUCATIONAL "EXCHANGES", THE FORMER SOVIET UNION AND OTHER EASTERN BLOC NATIONS SPONSORED UP TO 20,000 VIETNAMESE STUDENTS A YEAR ON "FULL" SCHOLARSHIPS. MOST VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS OVER 45 YEARS OLD HOLD DEGREES FROM MOSCOW, SOFIA, BUDAPEST, BERLIN, AND WARSAW ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS. WITH THE CHANGE IN POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES IN THOSE FORMER COMMUNIST COMRADE COUNTRIES, SCHOLARSHIPS DROPPED DRAMATICALLY AND IN SOME CASES, DISAPPEARED. MOST VIETNAMESE THESE DAYS WOULD PREFER TO GO TO THE U.S., AUSTRALIA OR EUROPE TO STUDY. END NOTE)

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	DOEE-00	ITCE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	EXME-00
	EUR-00	OIGO-00	E-00	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	FRB-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	INSE-00	ITC-01	LAB-01
	L-00	VCE-00	M-00	AC-01	DCP-01	NRCE-00	NSAE-00
	OCS-03	OES-01	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	USSS-00	SA-00	ASDS-01	EPAE-00	PMB-00
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OVERSEAS VIETNAMESE - NOT ALL IS WELL

110. (SBU) TOKMAKOV SAID THAT MOST OF THE 120,000 VIETNAMESE LIVING IN RUSSIA ARE DOING SO LEGALLY, BUT THERE "HAVE BEEN PROBLEMS" WITH SOME VIETNAMESE OVERSTAYING VISAS AND OTHERS ENGAGING IN TRADE INVOLVING COUNTERFEIT GOODS. ACCORDING TO ONE PRESS REPORT, RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES CRACKED DOWN IN AUGUST, CLOSING A VIETNAMESE-RUN TRADE CENTER AND SEIZING "COUNTERFEIT" GOODS AT ANOTHER. TOKMAKOV SAID THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN "UNFORTUNATE INCIDENTS" OF RUSSIAN "HOOLIGANS" ATTACKING VIETNAMESE IN MOSCOW. THE CPV'S HUNG CLAIMED THAT THERE ARE "NO ILLEGAL VIETNAMESE" IN RUSSIA. HE EXPLAINED THAT MANY VIETNAMESE HAD GONE TO RUSSIA DURING THE SOVIET ERA ON CONTRACTS; SOME WERE THE VICTIMS OF THE "RESULTING CHAOS" THAT ENSUED WHEN THE SOVIET UNION COLLAPSED AND MANY FACTORIES CHANGED OWNERSHIP. THUS, WHILE THERE MAY BE "MISUNDERSTANDINGS" REGARDING THEIR STATUS, VIETNAM DENIES ANY OF ITS CITIZENS ARE IN RUSSIA ILLEGALLY. HUNG SAID THAT MANH HAD PRESSED PUTIN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ALL VIETNAMESE LIVING IN RUSSIA. HUNG SAID THAT THERE ARE SIMILAR QUESTIONS REGARDING VIETNAMESE LIVING IN BELARUS, BUT THE NUMBERS ARE MUCH SMALLER.

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TERRORISM - WE CONDEMN IT, BUT STICK WITH THE UN

111. (SBU) MANH AND HIS HOSTS AGREED ON THE NEED TO ERADICATE TERRORISM. HOWEVER, HUNG NOTED THAT THE LEADERS HAD ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT COUNTERTERRORISM ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT WITHIN A MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK AND "WITHOUT INFRINGING ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF INDIVIDUAL NATIONS." AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE WITH BELARUS, BOTH SIDES "PROTEST AGAINST THE ABUSE OF ANTI-TERRORISM TO INTERFERE INTO OTHER NATIONS' INTERNAL AFFAIRS."

HUMAN RIGHTS - A POSSIBLE FUTURE ISSUE?

112. (SBU) WHILE THE ISSUE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DID NOT COME UP DURING THIS VISIT, DR. KHOAT SUGGESTED THAT IT COULD BE A FUTURE ISSUE WITH RUSSIA. HE NOTED THAT "A FEW" DUMA MEMBERS HAVE CRITICIZED VIETNAM OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS FOR ITS RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY. THE CPV'S HUNG CONFIRMED SEPARATELY THAT THIS ISSUE DID NOT COME DURING THE VISIT. HUNG STATED THAT SUCH A DISCUSSION WOULD BE "UNNATURAL" SINCE RUSSIA AND VIETNAM HAVE NO DISAGREEMENT OVER HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY. HE OPINED THAT, IN ANY LARGE LEGISLATIVE BODY, THERE ARE BOUND TO BE A "WIDE VARIETY" OF OPINIONS. HE DISCOUNTED THE VIEW THAT HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD EVER BE A BILATERAL ISSUE.

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DEFENSE COOPERATION

113. (SBU) MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION WAS NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED IN THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE. HOWEVER, TOKMAKOV SAID THAT, DURING THE VISIT, MANH REITERATED VIETNAM'S VIEW THAT MILITARY COOPERATION IS "IMPORTANT." TOKMAKOV NOTED THAT, WHILE VIETNAM CANNOT "AFFORD MUCH," ITS MILITARY STILL NEEDS BASIC EQUIPMENT AND SPARE PARTS THAT THE RUSSIANS CAN SUPPLY. THE CPV'S HUNG SAID SEPARATELY THAT THE SUBJECT WAS "DISCUSSED ONLY VERY GENERALLY" DURING BOTH VISITS. AN OCTOBER 7 GVN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT NOTED THAT VIETNAM AND BELARUS HAD AGREED

TO COOPERATE, INTER ALIA, ON "DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY."

14. (SBU) WHILE NOT FORMALLY PART OF THE MANH VISITS, SEPARATE VIETNAMESE MILITARY DELEGATIONS VISITED BOTH COUNTRIES AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME. ACCORDING TO A VIETNAMESE PRESS REPORT, IN THE FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER, A DELEGATION OF THE VIETNAM SEARCH-AND-RESCUE COMMISSION, HEADED BY ITS PERMANENT DEPUTY CHAIRMAN LIEUTENANT GENERAL NGUYEN HUY HIEU, HELD TALKS WITH HIS RUSSIAN COUNTERPARTS. THE REPORT NOTED THAT RUSSIAN OFFICIALS HAD REAFFIRMED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH VIETNAM IN "SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS, PERSONNEL TRAINING, AND EQUIPMENT SUPPLY." ON OCTOBER 16, ANOTHER VIETNAMESE MILITARY DELEGATION, LED BY AIR DEFENSE COMMANDER NGUYEN PHAN THAN, ARRIVED IN BELARUS

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FOR TALKS ON MILITARY AND MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION, ACCORDING TO A RUSSIAN PRESS REPORT. THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION WAS SLATED TO VISIT SEVERAL BELARUS AIR FORCE INSTALLATIONS AS WELL AS OTHER MILITARY UNITS AND DEFENSE INDUSTRIES. DR. KHOAT SAID THAT HE "DOUBTED THE VISITS WERE CONNECTED" BECAUSE THE GVN'S MINISTRY OF DEFENSE NORMALLY ARRANGES ITS VISITS INDEPENDENTLY. TOKMAKOV SAID SEPARATELY THAT THE VIETNAMESE MILITARY'S WORKING VISIT TO RUSSIA AROUND THE SAME TIME AS MANH'S WAS A "COINCIDENCE" AND "THE MINISTRIES HAD PROBABLY WORKED IT OUT AMONG THEMSELVES A LONG TIME AGO."

WHAT'S NEXT?

15. (U) THE CPV'S HUNG SAID THAT HE EXPECTED HIGH LEVEL VISITS TO CONTINUE AT A STEADY PACE OVER THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. HE ADDED THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE GVN LEADERSHIP MIGHT VISIT RUSSIA IN 2003, WHEN THERE WILL BE A CONGRESS FOR GRADUATES FROM RUSSIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING. MANH INVITED BOTH PUTIN AND LUKASHENKO TO VISIT VIETNAM AND, ACCORDING TO HUNG AND PRESS REPORTS, THEY "HAPPILY ACCEPTED." HOWEVER, NO DATES HAVE BEEN SET FOR THEIR VISITS.
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